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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
9 June 1966

State Department review completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

Tam Chau, Buddhist Institute chairman, told the US Ambassador that Ky and Thieu must step down before the South Vietnamese political situation can be stabilized. Buddhist leader Tri Quang, continuing his hunger strike in Hue, has accused the government of having further plans to "destroy Buddhism." The start of a US-ARVN military operation against Communists in the Hue area was delayed because roads were blocked by altars. There are indications that another North Vietnamese division may be infiltrating the South.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

A large Communist force ambushed a US convoy in Binh Long Province but the arrival of air and artillery support and reinforcements resulted in a US victory (Paras. 1-2). Operation HAWTHORNE continues in Kon-tum Province with all units reporting sporadic contact with the enemy (Para. 3). South Vietnamese search-and-destroy Operation BINH PHU 7 ends after six days in Binh Dinh Province (Para. 4).

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25X1II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Buddhist Institute chairman Tam Chau today repeated his belief that Ky and Thieu must step down before the political situation can be stabilized (Para. 1). A Buddhist plan to create an incident embarrassing to the US was apparently postponed today because of US foreknowledge (Para. 2). Tran Quang Thuan, a leading Buddhist lay politician, is about to be drafted for military service, according to press reports (Para. 3).

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Altars blocking roads in the Hue area delayed the

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beginning of a US-ARVN military operation today (Para. 6). Tri Quang, continuing his hunger strike, today accused the government of having further plans to "destroy Buddhism" (Para. 7).

III. Military Developments In North Vietnam:

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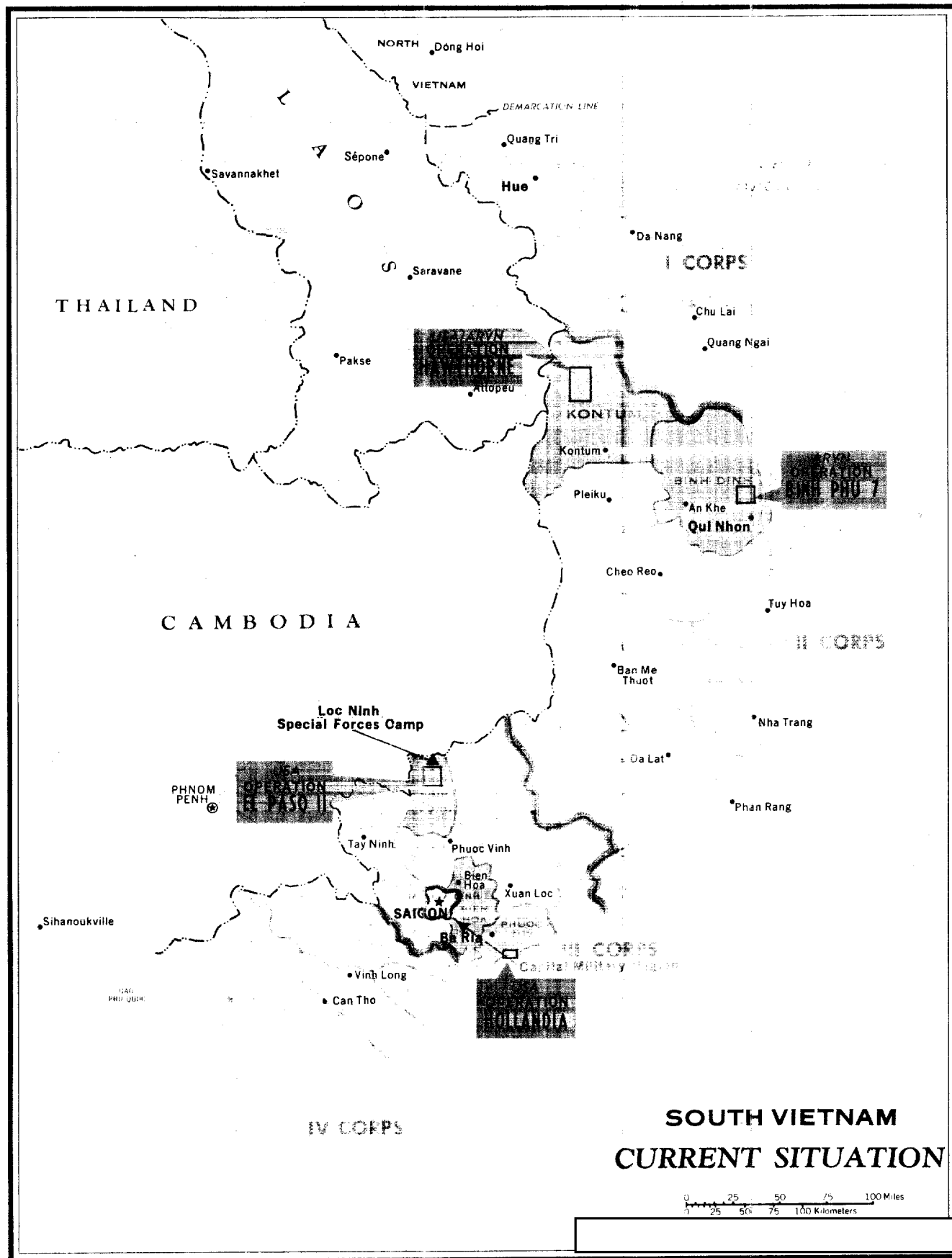
The North Vietnamese appear to be strengthening their militia and self-defense forces (Paras. 5-6).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The first Peking propaganda on the status of Sino-DRV relations since Ho Chi Minh's reported trip to China appears designed to demonstrate that relations remain good (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Early yesterday an estimated two-battalion Communist force ambushed a convoy of the US 1st Infantry Division in Binh Long Province, about 50 miles north of Saigon. This convoy was part of the three-battalion search-and-destroy Operation EL PASO II presently being conducted in the vicinity of the Loc Ninh Special Forces camp. The highway was to have been secured by South Vietnamese units. Tactical air and artillery support was provided and a two-company reaction force joined the convoy. The ensuing engagement lasted five hours before the Viet Cong broke contact. US casualties are reported as 15 killed and 40 wounded. Press accounts of the action indicate that as many as 250 enemy troops were killed, although initial official reports list 110 enemy killed.

2. South Vietnamese forces that had been engaged in securing the highway made contact with the enemy force in the same general area and reported killing 30 Communists while suffering losses of 15 killed and 17 wounded. One US adviser was also reported missing. Last night the Loc Ninh Special Forces camp was shelled in a one-half hour mortar attack in which one American was killed and 19 South Vietnamese wounded.

3. Operation HAWTHORNE continues in western Kontum Province with two US companies making contact today with an estimated two battalions of Viet Cong. Infantry units are being airlifted in to reinforce the engaged units. Although no casualty figures are available, US losses are reported as moderate. All units of this search-and-destroy operation reported sporadic contact throughout the day and the killing of numerous snipers.

4. South Vietnamese search-and-destroy Operation BINH PHU 7 has ended after six days. The operation was conducted by four South Vietnamese battalions 30 miles north of Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh Province. Ninety tactical air sorties were flown

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in support of this mission. Enemy casualties included 173 killed and 34 captured. Friendly casualties totaled 16 killed and 55 wounded.

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US forces are continuing to operate in Phuoc Tuy Province. Two battalions of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade today completed Operation HARDIHOOD six miles northwest of Ba Ria, in Phuoc Tuy Province, and Operation HOLLANDIA, a US search-and-destroy operation, began yesterday with the deployment of elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in southern Phuoc Tuy Province. The mission of this operation is to clear the Long Hai Peninsula and secure a construction site.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Buddhist Activities in Saigon

1. In an interview with Ambassador Lodge today, Buddhist Institute chairman Tam Chau remained firm in his belief that Ky and Thieu must resign before the political situation can be stabilized and urged that the US Government "encourage" the two leaders to step down. He characterized the recent enlargement of the Directorate as an empty gesture and his two colleagues at the meeting expressed the belief that honest elections could not be carried out by the present government. They pointed to the government's military move into Da Nang on 15 May as a betrayal of the agreement which had been worked out previously.

2. Buddhist Institute leaders apparently had also planned to embarrass a US Embassy representative at a forthcoming Buddhist ceremony by presenting him with US-made tear gas cannisters and a rifle used by Vietnamese Government troops to suppress Buddhist demonstrators. Foreknowledge of the plan by US officials has apparently led to at least a postponement of the event.

3. Tran Quang Thuan, a leading Buddhist lay politician and former cabinet member in the Khanh government, has reportedly been recalled for active military service, according to the press. A Vietnamese Defense Ministry announcement reportedly stated today that Thuan had not completed his legal term of military service and that several notices ordering him to report for duty had not been answered. The announcement concluded that if Thuan did not report within 48 hours, he would be tried in accordance with existing laws. Thuan, who accompanied Tam Chau on his visit to Ambassador Lodge this morning, declared that the government had been "threatening" to draft him although he had completed his military service, and cited this as another instance of government intimidation of the Buddhists and an indication of the impossibility of fair elections.

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Hue

6. The altar blockade in and near Hue continued today and caused the temporary delay of a scheduled US-Vietnamese military operation in the vicinity. At last report the operation was initiated by mid-afternoon (Vietnam time). Tri Quang had arranged to clear the roads temporarily to permit the passage of troops, but the altars were put up again before all the convoys had moved through the area. Thus far, Vietnamese troops, including the airborne and marine battalions, have not attempted to clear the roads of altars in the immediate vicinity of Hue. However, a roadblock at a bridge between Hue and Da Nang was reportedly removed by government troops today, who also arrested some 50 Buddhist boy scouts nearby.

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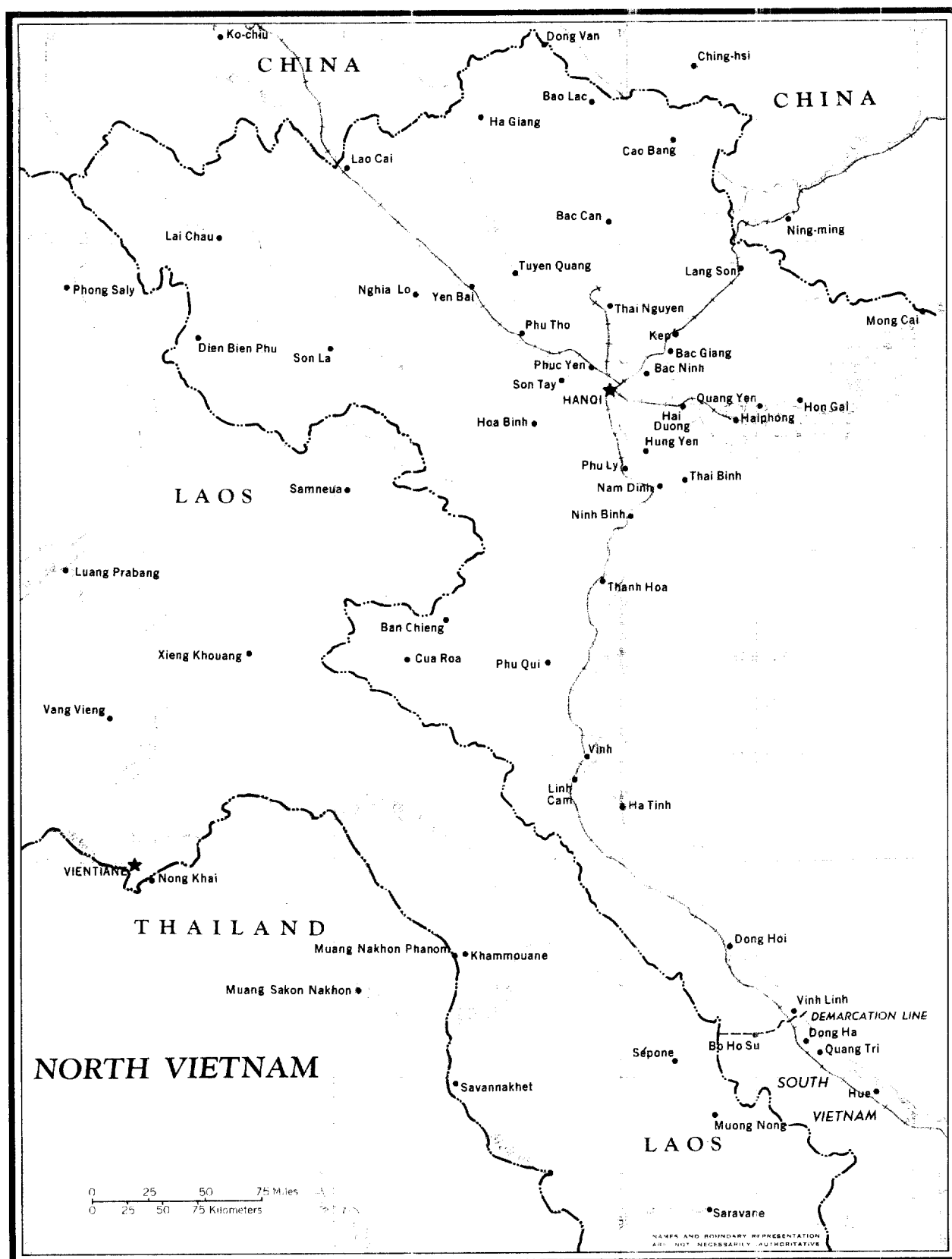
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7. Tri Quang, continuing his hunger strike today, held a press conference this morning, in the office of the province chief. He declared that the government was intent upon destroying Buddhism, and that it had drawn up a list of Buddhist leaders to be assassinated, with his name heading the list. Quang also stated that government authorities "had asked for his help" in clearing the roads this morning to allow the military convoys to pass through. He declared that if the government asks for his help again, he will give it so long as the troops are moving on an operation against the Viet Cong.

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North Vietnamese Militia

5. There has been considerable emphasis in recent weeks in both the North Vietnamese press and radio on the need to strengthen the training, tasks and leadership roles of the militia and self-defense forces in the DRV. Most of the interest probably flowed from a recent party Central Committee Secretariat directive on this subject. According to the press the building and training of these forces is to emphasize their readiness to "cope with any eventuality." For example, all units are to be prepared to shoot down low-flying aircraft, while units in coastal areas "must learn to fight rangers, cope with surprise attacks, and attack ranger ships." Units in mountain areas are to be alert and fight "ranger paratroopers."

6. The US Embassy in Saigon has commented that this intensive campaign once again highlights Hanoi's efforts to mobilize the entire society and that the regime may envisage a more active home defense role for these units as regular army troops are increasingly diverted to the South.

7. The self-defense militia forces are one of four categories of forces in North Vietnam. The others are the regular army, regional forces, and the armed public security forces. The mission of the self-defense forces are to protect production, order, and security in their local areas and to ensure communications and transportation. In addition, they provide local air defense protection against US strike aircraft and recruit, supply, and

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train replacements for the regular armed forces. The militia forces are different from regional forces in that the latter do not have any production duties and are assigned to larger areas or territories than the militia. The armed public security forces are uniformed and are organized on a provincial basis for the protection of the coastline and borders of the DRV.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The first Chinese comment on the status of Peking-Hanoi relations following Ho Chi Minh's reported trip to China repeats Peking's standard line of support for Hanoi's war and may be designed to demonstrate that there has been no deterioration in the relations of the two countries. A Peking radio broadcast on the current visit to China of a DRV cultural delegation portrayed Sino-Vietnamese relations as being as close and friendly as ever.

2. The Chinese head of the Commission for Cultural Relations, playing host to his Vietnamese counterpart at a banquet on 8 June, routinely commended the Vietnamese struggle against the US, and went out of his way to warn against a "coordinated US-Soviet trick" to end the war through peace talks. He expressed confidence that the Vietnamese people would be "neither brow-beaten nor deceived." He assured the Vietnamese that the Chinese would spare neither "cost nor sacrifice" in their "wholehearted" support of Hanoi's struggle. The DRV representative, in turn, expressed his conviction that Chinese support was indeed "wholehearted" and characterized Chinese-Vietnamese relations as being as close as "lips and teeth."

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